

Testimonial for Inclusion Teaming

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Throughout my many years of working with children in different mental health settings, I have frequently been exposed to the problems faced by youngsters struggling with social skills and communication deficits stemming from Autism spectrum disorders. These children can be gravely hampered in their efforts to join normal social circles and to function in school settings, often leading to dysfunctional interactions, bullying and scapegoating. The approach of Inclusion Teaming is truly innovative and visionary as most social skills groups just focus on teaching the children with deficits. I have worked with so many students who would have benefitted tremendously from the Inclusion Teaming model of working together with typical peers. This opportunity for two way experiential learning and exposure is what makes Inclusion Teaming unique. Students with communication challenges need to not only learn the skills they lack but to have real life opportunities to practice with typical peers and gain direct understanding of the thoughts and expectations of others.

But perhaps the most unique aspect of the Inclusion Teaming approach is the impact on the typical peers and the potential ripple effect through a school community. When the typical peers gain a direct understanding of how and why their "different" friends act and talk like they do, the growth in empathy is profound. If we are going to build school communities where bullying is seen as the intolerable exception, this kind of empathy is the place to start. We also need to look at what we have experienced in our country of the devastating impact of socially isolated students with apparently untreated mental health conditions. Building connections where students feel understood and cared about is crucial in reaching out effectively to these students who may be suffering at a level so profound that we cannot even imagine. Those connections have to start with direct person-to-person experiences. The Inclusion Teaming groups set the stage for these connections, as well as providing the guidance to help them become comfortable and meaningful for both sides. What more powerful impact on the safety of a school community can there be than the true understanding of one another that grows from working together in shared purpose? Inclusion Teaming groups should be provided within every local community, bringing youth from many schools in the community together, as part of a comprehensive effort to build safer, more supportive school communities for all students.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

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